



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

WHY WE NEED A SECRETARY OF EDUCATION¹

GEORGE DRAYTON STRAYER
Teachers College, Columbia University

Our American public-school system must be strengthened if it is to meet the demands of our democracy. The large percentage of illiteracy among our adult population, the lack of any adequate program of physical education or health service, the failure to provide any thoroughgoing program for the Americanization of foreigners, the overwhelming proportion of inadequately trained teachers at work in our schools, all indicate our failure to make good the promise of democracy, and all demand national action for the sake of national safety and national development.

We must grow anxious when we contemplate the limited literacy of one out of four of our soldiers between twenty-one and thirty-one years of age, the physical unfitness for general military service of one out of three of this group, the twelve to fourteen millions of foreigners who have little appreciation of American institutions or American ideals, and the meager preparation of teachers for the work in which they are engaged. How many Americans know that four-fifths of our teachers have had less than a four-year high-school course and two years of professional training in preparation for their work. The need is national, the obligation is national, and the encouragement which the nation alone can give, both in terms of money and in terms of a recognition of the place of education in our national government, is demanded by the crisis which confronts us.

The commission on the Emergency in Education of the National Education Association, acquainted with the facts as they exist in the United States today, discussed earnestly the method which might best be employed in enlisting the aid and encouragement of our national government in promoting education throughout the nation. It is an interesting fact that the membership of this

¹ Address delivered before the Society of the College Teachers of Education, February 23, 1920, at Cleveland Ohio.

commission is composed of five of the leading state superintendents of the United States, seven of the leading city superintendents of schools, representatives of state normal schools, state universities, public-school systems, and endowed educational institutions. These men and women have met in conference for discussion ten times during the period of the past two years, for from three days to a week at a time.

Growing out of their deliberations there was prepared the bill now before Congress commonly known as the Smith-Towner Bill, which provides for a department of education with a secretary in the President's cabinet, and for appropriations of one hundred million dollars annually for the removal of illiteracy, for the Americanization of foreigners, for the development of a program of physical education and health service, for the training of teachers, and for the equalization of educational opportunity through the increase of teachers' salaries.

The question of the wisdom of securing legislation which will place a secretary of education in the President's cabinet has been raised. I betray no secret when I say that this question was raised in the mind of every member of the commission and by scores of state and city superintendents of schools, principals of normal schools, and presidents of colleges and universities during the period required for the formulation of the bill which we hope may be enacted into law. Those who were willing to give attention to the bill during the period devoted to its formulation differed on many points. Some of them advocated originally a board of education with an appointed executive officer. All of those who gave of their time and energy in the discussion of the measure finally agreed that it was best to seek legislation which would provide for a secretaryship of education in the President's cabinet. It is easy to explain why this conclusion was reached.

In the first place, those who drafted the measure, which provides the needed leadership and encouragement for education throughout the nation, sought the advice of members of the United States Senate and of the House of Representatives. They were able, as well, to place the matter before the President of the United States. From these sources it was made very clear that no measure which created an independent board or commission would be looked upon with favor by those upon whom we had to depend

for action. The overwhelming agreement of men prominent in both political parties in favor of the establishment of a secretaryship of education did not change the belief of those responsible for drafting the bill, but it did confirm them in their judgment with respect to the wisdom of asking for the creation of a department of education. Men prominent in other departments of government gave to the commission the benefit of their judgment. Conferences with representatives of four departments of government made it clear that they would welcome the leadership which could be provided by a department of education. They expressed the conviction that they could hope to profit largely by the counsel and leadership of the representative of education in our national government only if this executive enjoyed cabinet rank.

There are more than two score bureaus, divisions, and independent administrations in Washington concerned with the problems of education. Through no fault of these administrative units as at present organized, they have, as a matter of fact, often worked at cross-purposes and many times duplicated each other's efforts. The promotion of efficiency by the consolidation of duplicating and overlapping educational agencies into one department, under a responsible head, equal in rank to the heads of the other executive departments of our government, seems to be the only feasible solution of the problem which confronts us. It is a noteworthy fact that of the one hundred and sixty million dollars appropriated by Congress for educational purposes for the year ending June 30, 1918, the Bureau of Education received \$481,000, or less than one-third of one per cent of the total. It is equally striking that while the Bureau of Education was allowed \$75,200 for salaries for this period, the Civil Service Commission had for the same purpose \$340,000, the Bureau of Plant Industry paid salaries amounting to \$440,000, and the West Point salary list amounted to \$983,602. If education is to have the recognition which it should receive, and if the work in research and investigation which should be undertaken is to be done, the educational service provided by our national government must have a recognition which it does not now enjoy.

The leaders of both political parties are committed to the establishment of a budget system of making appropriations. One of the oldest of the members of the House of Representatives said

recently on the floor of that body that if the Smith-Towner Bill was passed and a secretaryship of education created, Congress would find itself under the necessity of voting large sums of money for the encouragement of education throughout the nation. The gentleman in question evidently felt that the truth that he had expressed might prove to be a strong argument in favor of the measure which he was opposing, for in the congressional record for that day it was recorded that he asked the privilege of revising his remarks. We agree entirely with his judgment. When the budget is made up, the man outside of the executive departments, in the splendid isolation in which some persons would place him, as a commissioner of education employed as the chief of a clerical staff engaged by a national board of education, would have little or no voice in the making of the budget. A secretary of education in the President's cabinet would be able to bring to the attention of other members of the cabinet, and to the President himself, the needs of education and the service which the national government would be able to render in the encouragement and development of public education in the nation.

It has been suggested that our experience in the administration of education in the state and in our cities argues in favor of the establishment of a like form of organization in the national government. One who makes such an assumption is guilty of an argument from an analogy which is entirely invalid. The Smith-Towner Bill provides specifically that "all the educational facilities encouraged by the provisions of this act, and accepted by a state, shall be organized, supervised, and administered exclusively by the legally constituted state and local education authorities of said state."

Those who believe in the establishment of a secretaryship of education believe quite as firmly that the nation should neither organize, administer, nor supervise the schools. They recognize, as well, the fact that the American city government is being reformed by abandoning the form of organization which still prevails in our national government. One needs only to mention commission government or the city manager plan to realize how far our cities have moved from the older type of organization, which was a prototype of our national system.

But there is a still more fundamental reason why the analogy with city school administration must be considered invalid. The

city board of education has the problem of hiring the executive officer and of passing upon his recommendations with respect to the teachers to be employed, the buildings to be constructed, the books and supplies to be purchased, the janitors to be hired, the form of educational organizations to be developed, the plan of supervision to be undertaken, the courses of study to be developed, and the like. It is essential that the executive officer of this board be protected against the interference of petty politicians in the exercise of his functions. A secretary of education would have none of these functions and would be subject to none of the annoyances or limitations imposed or sought to be imposed by the partisan and wholly selfish individual who wishes to control the school system for personal ends.

Aside from its function as an agency for the distributing of aid in the encouragement of education to the several states, the bill creating the department specifies that it "shall be the duty of the department of education to conduct studies and investigations in the field of education and to report thereon. Research shall be undertaken in (a) illiteracy; (b) immigrant education; (c) public-school education, and especially rural education; (d) physical education, including health education, recreation, and sanitation; (e) preparation and supply of competent teachers for the public schools; and (f) in such other fields as, in the judgment of the secretary of education, should require attention and study." One who invokes the analogy of the city or state administration of education has failed completely to get the conception of the office of secretary of education involved in the bill before Congress. The functions specified for the secretary of education are entirely similar to those exercised by other executive departments of our national government and completely unlike the major functions of state and city educational executives.

It is amusing to have one's attention called to the fact that it would be possible to have the President appoint a national board of education without having it confirmed by the Senate, which would introduce a political element. It is true that the Constitution of the United States provides in Art. II, Sec. 2, Sub-section 2, that the Congress of the United States "may by law vest the appointment of such inferior officers as they may think proper in the President alone, in the courts of law, or in the heads of departments." It is precisely this inferiority which has long attached to education in our national government which those of us who would promote the development

of education through the sanction and assistance of the national government seek to avoid. It is not the dignity of our own work which is acknowledged by the creation of a department of education in the national government which we seek. It is, rather, the effectiveness of the educational service undertaken by the nation which we would promote.

But it has been suggested that the appointment of a cabinet officer by the President of the United States would, of necessity, place in the office of greatest leadership in education at one time a Democrat and at another time a Republican as the administration may change from term to term. There are even those who would have us believe that when we had a democratic president we would have democratic education, and that when we had a republican president we would have republican education. One might as well ask, in all seriousness, whether our armies in the fields of France fought a partisan battle, or whether during the administration of Theodore Roosevelt we dug a republican canal, as to suggest that a man of the caliber who has been chosen by any one of our presidents would seek, in the office of secretary of education, to introduce partisan politics into the conduct of the work of his office. We know that in the Department of Agriculture the same secretary carried over through several administrations. We are confident that the secretary of commerce, the secretary of labor, and the secretary of the interior have each, in turn, in the several administrations in which they have served, sought to promote the ends for which their department was organized. We are clear that the secretary of war and the secretary of the navy have worked consistently for the development of what they believed would be the most effective type of organization providing for the national defense. It is clear, as well, that while secretaries have come and gone, the professional staff of each of the departments has been the body that has given continuity to the service which has been provided.

But let us hope that education will enter into political discussion in the future. It is as important for the nation that we discuss the question of the amount of aid to be given to education, the type of investigation to be undertaken, and the leadership to be provided by the national department of education, as that we should debate the question of universal military training, of subsidies for the development of American shipping, the conservation of our natural

resources, or the extension of our commerce. If the creation of a secretaryship of education will bring before the people of the United States for serious political discussion the needs of education throughout the nation, we shall have accomplished more than will be done by the appropriations which are granted.

Our national government has long been committed to the policy of aiding public education. Through the grant of lands and of money, public schools, normal schools, and great universities have been established and developed. As splendid as this support has been, we have lacked in our national government the voice of the one whose obligation it was to think and to act for the safety and for the development of our democracy through the creation and maintenance of a truly democratic system of public education. Men and women everywhere, within the profession and outside of it, in thousands and hundreds of thousands, the leaders in education and in civic and social organizations, have, with scarcely a dissenting voice, advocated the establishment of a department of education in order to promote the general welfare. We have every reason to believe that those responsible for legislation will hear the voice of the people and will act in accordance with the judgment which they have so clearly expressed.